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SUBJECT: ELECTION DATE PASSES WITH MINOR, PEACEFUL PROTESTS

REF: A) ABIDJAN 675 B) ABIDJAN 720

¶1. (SBU) November 29, the date scheduled for presidential elections in Cote d'Ivoire, came and went with little fanfare. The GOCI made no official announcement on the postponed elections, leaving the November 11 statement (ref a) by Robert Mambe, the President of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), as the only official acknowledgment that the date had slipped. The opposition PDCI held a demonstration November 29 encouraging Ivoirians to protest any further postponement. Charles Ble Goude, President Gbagbo's national youth campaign director, also publicly expressed opposition to the delay, insisting that the CEI set a date within the next three months.

NEW DATE NOT LIKELY TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Alcide Djedje, Cote d'Ivoire's Permanent Representative to the United Nations and close presidential advisor, told Ambassador November 30 that he doubted a new date would be announced at the next meeting of the Permanent Concertation Framework (CPC), which will take place in Ouagadougou on December 3 (Gbagbo is departing Cote d'Ivoire on December 1). Djedje said that the contestation period needed to unfold further before a definitive date could be determined. He did not appear to be overly concerned by the prospect that the contestation period might go beyond the 30-day limit, however.

BUT SIGNS OF PROGRESS STILL VISIBLE

¶3. (SBU) In another sign that obstacles to elections are being removed despite the fact that the election date was pushed back, President Gbagbo signed seven decrees on November 17, resolving most of the outstanding military issues that stymied the formation of joint brigades to provide security for the elections. Alain Lobognon, a close advisor to Prime Minister Soro, told Ambassador that the decrees (official texts of which are not yet available) address the grades/ranks of the 400 former FDS soldiers who joined the rebellion in 2002; spell out the criteria for the 5,000 FAFN who seek to join the new army; and clarify the post-crisis status of the 4,000 FAFN elements who join their FDS counterparts to form mixed brigades under the control of the ICC.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: The lack of strong public reaction to the failure to hold elections as scheduled is not surprising given that progress towards that end is being made. As noted in ref b, the posting of the electoral list has given Ivoirians a sense of hope that the crisis really is nearing an end. That, along with resolution of many of the key military issues, suggests that while there may still be bumps along the road, Cote d'Ivoire appears to be moving steadily towards elections.

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